

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000607

SIPDIS

STATE PASS USDA FOR FAS/CMP/DLP/SINDELARE
CMP/GFD/RIEMENSCHNEIDER; CMP/COT/LBLUM
ITP/EAMED/MACKE/RICHEY
OFSTS/LHARBERT/APHIS/ATORRES
STATE PASS USTR
BRUSSELS ALSO FOR USEU
GENEVA FOR USTR, ALSO AGRICULTURE
MILAN FOR PRINCIPAL OFFICER
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FLORENCE FOR PRINCIPAL OFFICER
NAPLES FOR PRINCIPAL OFFICER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [EU](#) [ETRD](#) [EU](#) [IT](#) [ITEAGR](#)
SUBJECT: FIFTYFOURTH CASE OF BSE IN ITALY

¶1. ON FEBRUARY 5, ITALY'S HEALTH AUTHORITIES REACTED TO THE FIRST SUSPECTED CASE OF THE HUMAN VERSION OF MAD COW DISEASE, NEW VARIANT CREUTZFELDT-JAKOB DISEASE (NVCJD). THE PATIENT IS A 25 YEAR OLD SICILIAN WOMAN FROM TRAPANI. ITALY'S MINISTER OF HEALTH GIROLAMO SIRCHIA AND THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE GIANNI ALEMANNO BOTH APPEARED ON TELEVISION NEWS WITH ASSERTIONS THAT MEAT IN ITALY IS SAFE NOW, THAT THE SYSTEMS TO CHECK BSE ARE IN PLACE AND ADEQUATE, AND THAT THIS INCIDENT IS A CASE THAT HAS HAD A LONG INCUBATION PERIOD. THE QUESTION OF THE DAY IS HOW THE ITALIAN PUBLIC WILL RECEIVE THESE MESSAGES. ITALIANS' LEVEL OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND GOI EFFORTS TO ASSURE THE PUBLIC THAT IT IS SAFEGUARDING HEALTH, MAY SUFFER FROM THIS DEVELOPMENT.

¶2. THERE CERTAINLY IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE AFFLICTED WOMAN CONTRACTED THE DISEASE FROM MEAT CONSUMED IN ITALY. GOI STATEMENTS FOCUS ON THE FACT THAT THE CONTAGION MIGHT HAVE BEEN PRESENT IN ITALY AT A TIME WHEN NEW
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VARIANT CREUTZFELDT-JAKOB WAS UNKNOWN AND PRECAUTIONS NOW TAKEN TO CONTROL THE DISEASE IN CATTLE HAD NOT YET BEEN TAKEN. THE FIRST ITALIAN COW TESTING POSITIVE TO BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY (BSE) WAS DISCOVERED IN JANUARY, 2001. TESTING IN ITALY HAS BEEN OBLIGATORY SINCE THEN.

¶3. THE AFFLICTED WOMAN SUSPECTED AS ITALY'S FIRST HUMAN CASE OF NVCJD WAS ADMITTED TO THE HOSPITAL ABOUT ONE MONTH AGO. HER DIAGNOSIS WAS CONFIRMED BY TESTS CONDUCTED AT THE LONDON COLLEGE OF MEDICINE, BUT ONLY POST MORTEM TESTS ARE CONCLUSIVE IN CASES OF NVCJD, WHICH IS CONSIDERED FATAL. IF THE ITALIAN PATIENT SUCCUMBS TO WHAT TURNS OUT TO BE NVCJD, THIS WILL BE THE FIRST CONFIRMED HUMAN CASE TO HAVE OCCURRED IN ITALY. ALTHOUGH OTHER SUSPECTED CASES HAVE BEEN REPORTED PREVIOUSLY IN THE ITALIAN PRESS, NONE HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED. SINCE ITS DISCOVERY IN 1986, APPROXIMATELY 100 DEATHS, MORE THAN NINETY FIVE PERCENT OF WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED FROM THE DISEASE.

¶4. SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE SUPPORTS A CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BSE AND NVCJD BUT LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT THE INCUBATION PERIOD BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO THE INFECTIVE AGENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF SYMPTOMS. PARTICULARLY IN ITALY,
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MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BSE AND CONFUSION OF THE DISEASE WITH THE UNRELATED FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE (FMD) IN CATTLE, CONTRIBUTE TO PUBLIC SUSCEPTIBILITY TO SENSATIONAL JOURNALISM ON ANIMAL DISEASE AND ITS CONNECTIONS TO HUMAN HEALTH. ITALIANS DO NOT HAVE A WELL GROUNDED TRUST IN THEIR AUTHORITIES AND THEY ARE NOT INCLINED TO TURN TO THE GOI TO BRING THEM RELIABLE INFORMATION. BY WAY OF CONTRAST, IN THE U.S. RECENT SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION INCLUDING THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE HARVARD RISK

ASSESSMENT ON BSE, IS PUBLISHED ON THE WEBSITES OF THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL, THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND THE US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ALL OF WHICH ARE FREQUENTLY USED BY THE PUBLIC.

15. THE FIRST CASES OF MAD COW IN ITALY WERE DISCOVERED IN 1994 IN IMPORTED CATTLE. THESE CASES WERE FOUND IN TRAPANI WHEN TWO COWS AMONG A HERD IMPORTED FROM BRITAIN WERE FOUND TO TEST POSITIVE TO BSE ALTHOUGH THE HERD

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00	CTME-00	DODE-00
	ITCE-00	SRPP-00	EB-00	EXME-00	E-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	FRB-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	ITC-01	L-00
	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OES-01	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01
	ACE-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00
	USIE-00	SNIS-00	NISC-00	DRL-02	G-00	SAS-00	/011W

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R 071553Z FEB 02
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2014
USDA FAS WASHDC 1996
EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
USMISSION GENEVA
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL NAPLES

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WAS SEIZED, SOME ANIMALS WERE STOLEN AND PRESUMABLY ILLEGALLY SLAUGHTERED. PERHAPS RIGHTLY SO, THIS HAS RAISED JOURNALISTS' QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GOI'S ABILITY TO ENFORCE THEIR CONTROLS. IN ITALY TO DATE 541,233 BSE TESTS HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED ON CATTLE. SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 2001, 54 CASES OF BSE, OR MAD COW DISEASE, HAVE BEEN DETECTED IN ITALIAN CATTLE. SEMBLER

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